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Letter dated 9 January 2001 from the Chairman of the Pacific Island Forum group of countries in New York for January 2001 addressed to Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, transmitting a paper entitled "Small Arms and Light Weapons: The Interests and Involvement of Pacific Island Forum Countries"

On behalf of the countries of the Pacific Island Forum represented in New York, I have the honour to transmit herewith a paper entitled "Small Arms and Light Weapons: The Interests and Involvement of Pacific Island Forum Countries" (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the paper circulated as a document of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

(*Signed*) Jeremiah **Manele**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Chairman of the Pacific Island Forum group
of countries in New York for January 2001

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Annex

Small Arms and Light Weapons: The Interests and Involvement of Pacific Island Forum Countries

The countries of the Pacific Island Forum strongly support international efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. As a region, the South Pacific has not been immune from the devastating humanitarian and socio-economic impact of conflicts fuelled by the illicit use, trade and accumulation of small arms and light weapons. And unlike some parts of the world, in the South Pacific the problem is not measured by the flow of tens of thousands of high-powered military-style weapons. Just a handful of very basic weapons can destabilize small communities with limited resources, and contribute to political and social unrest.

The countries of the Pacific Island Forum are therefore committed to making a constructive contribution to the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. We look to the 2001 United Nations Conference to produce realistic outcomes that address the issue of small arms and light weapons in a practical way, by effectively regulating the use, transfer and accumulation of small arms, which harm civilians and destabilize communities.

The countries of the Pacific Island Forum are already acting to meet the problems posed by small arms and light weapons. In June 1996, at a South Pacific Forum Regional Security Committee meeting, Papua New Guinea proposed the development of a common regional approach to weapons control. This proposal was enthusiastically received, and since then steady progress has been made towards this goal.

- At the direction of the South Pacific Forum Regional Security Committee, in February 1997 the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference examined current laws on firearms control and licensing.
- In October 1998, the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference drafted the "Honiara Initiative" on a common approach to weapons control. The "Honiara Initiative" includes language on the marking of firearms, strengthening of import and export controls, licensing requirements, record-keeping and information exchange. It covers firearms, firearm parts and illicit manufacturing and trafficking.
- At the 1999 South Pacific Forum, Forum leaders, using the "Honiara Initiative" as a basis, approved the commencement of work on a draft legal framework for the implementation of common weapon control measures.
- In March 2000 the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference and the Oceania Customs Organization met to consider a draft framework covering non-firearm weapons as well as firearms. As a result, the "Nadi Framework" was produced, incorporating the "Honiara Initiative" and non-firearms weapon issues. The "Nadi Framework" is based on the premise that possession and use of firearms, ammunition, other related materials and prohibited weapons is a privilege conditional on the overriding need to ensure public safety and that public safety will be enhanced by imposing strict controls on the import, possession and use of firearms, ammunition, other related materials and prohibited weapons.

- At their meeting in October 2000, leaders of the Pacific Island Forum (formerly the South Pacific Forum) countries agreed to develop model legislation to facilitate implementation and enforcement of the common approach to weapon control encapsulated in the "Nadi Framework". It is expected that this model legislation will be finalized by mid-2001 at the latest.

At the October 2000 Pacific Island Forum leaders meeting, Australia offered to host a small arms workshop for Pacific Island countries. The purpose of this workshop, likely to take place in April 2001, will be to provide practical advice to legislators, law enforcement officers, customs officers and other influential practitioners involved in regulating the use and ownership of small arms and light weapons, to help them implement and enforce the model legislation. The workshop will also provide an opportunity for Pacific Island Forum countries to consolidate their approach in advance of the 2001 United Nations Conference.